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THE INDY

ISSUE #115, FEBRUARY 1 - 21, 2008
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

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The Independent is a New York-based free newspaper published 17 times a year on Fridays. Since 2000, more than 600 citizen journalists, artists and media activists have contributed their time and energy to this project. Winner of dozens of New York Independent Press Association awards, *The Independent* is dedicated to empowering people to create a true alternative to the corporate press by encouraging citizens to produce their own media. *The Independent* is funded by subscriptions, donations, grants, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising from organizations with similar missions. Volunteers write and edit articles, take photographs, do design work and illustrations, help distribute papers, update the website and more! *The Independent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

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community calender

Please send event announcements to
indyevents@gmail.com.

The next editorial meeting for *The Independent* is Tuesday, Feb 5 at 7pm.
4 W. 43rd St, Room 311. All are welcome.

FEBRUARY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH!

SAT FEB 2

4pm • Free
FILM: "AMERICAN BLACKOUT,"
a chronicle of the election fraud of 2000/2004 as Black voters were removed from voter rolls and denied access to voting machines.
Rocky Sullivan's of Red Hook,
34 Van Dyke & Dwight
718-666-2347 • rockysullivans.com

SUN FEB 3 – SAT FEB 9

EVENTS: "ISRAELI APARTHEID WEEK," panel discussions, cultural events, teach-ins, protests and other events all week at various locations around the city.
Sponsored by NYU Students for Justice in Palestine, Falasteen & the Arab Students Assn at Columbia, Action WEDs Against the War, Adalah NY, Palestine Education Project, WESPAC Foundation and others. endisraeliapartheid.net

MON FEB 4

9am • Free
COURT SUPPORT: For Sean Bell family during case of Marc Cooper, Giscard Isnora and Michael Oliver, the officers that killed Bell.
Queens Supreme Court,
88-11 Sutphin Blvd • justiceforsean.net
866-695-2992

TUE FEB 5

7pm • Free
DISCUSSION: *BLUE GRIT: MAKING IMPOSSIBLE, IMPROBABLE & INSPIRATIONAL POLITICAL CHANGE IN AMERICA*, with author Laura Flanders.
1st Tue Series hosted by author/activist Mark Crispin Miller.
McNally Robinson, 52 Prince St
212-274-1160 • mcnallyrobinsonnyc.com

THU FEB 7

7pm • Free
FORUM: 2008 ELECTIONS.
Independent contributors Arun Gupta,

Jessica Lee, Nicholas Powers and Steven Wishnia will discuss the super Tuesday Primary results and how to creatively respond this year's elections.
Freebird Books and Goods,
123 Columbia St. (Red Hook, Bklyn)
freebirdbooks.com

FRI FEB 8

7:30pm • \$5-\$10 suggested
SCREENING/DISCUSSION: "WHAT WE WANT, WHAT WE BELIEVE."
The Newsreel Collective worked with The Black Panther Party to produce films that activists could use while organizing in their communities.
Bluestockings Books, 172 Allen St
212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

SAT FEB 9

3-5:30pm • Free
FORUM: "IMMIGRATION AND IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS" with WBAI host Deepa Fernandes, as well as speakers from the Carribean and Arabic communities. Sponsored by Prospect Lefferts Voices for Peace & Justice.
Refreshments and childcare provided.
Church of the Evangel, Bedford Ave & Hawthorne St, Bklyn
prospectforpeace@verizon.net

8-10:30pm • \$12/\$9 members

MUSIC: BEV GRANT/JUDY GORMAN/
ALIX DOBKIN at the People's Voice Cafe to honor and celebrate women's history.
The Workmen's Circle, 45 E 33rd St
212-787-3903 • peoplesvoicecafe.org

SUN FEB 10

2-4pm • \$10/\$15/\$25 sliding scale
DISCUSSION: "PSYCHOLOGY & ECONOMICS: A MARXIAN PERSPECTIVE," with Harriet Fraad and Richard Wolff.
Brecht Forum, 451 West St
212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

TUE FEB 12

6:30pm • Free
TALK: "RACE AND NATIONAL POLITICS IN AMERICA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON WHAT THE OBAMA CANDIDACY MEANS FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS." The historical legacy of African Americans in politics from the 1800s to the presidential candidacy of Senator Barack Obama.

FEBRUARY



CURIOUS WHY THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA IS IGNORING THAT STORY IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD? Want to take a chance at writing it yourself? *The Independent* will host its community workshop, "Introduction to Journalism and Indymedia," Sunday, Feb. 10, 1pm-5pm. \$5-20 sliding scale. RSVP required by e-mailing indyreporting@gmail.com or calling 212-221-0521. Be the media!
PHOTO: JESSICA LEE

The New School, Wollman Hall,
65 W 11th St • 212-229-5488
newschool.edu/publicprograms

THU FEB 14

6-7:30pm • Free
TALK: "HOW THINKING LIKE AN ECONOMIST UNDERMINES COMMUNITY," with Professor Stephen A. Marglin. Please RSVP. The New School for Social Research, 65 5th Ave, Wolff Conference Room
212-229-5901 x4911 • newschool.edu/cepa

SAT FEB 16

10am-9pm • \$5 sugg.
BENEFIT: "UNITY RALLY AGAINST HATE CRIMES," Black History Month Benefit & Open Mic for the Williams Family. With performances, dance, spoken word, and more.
Medgar Evers College, Founders Auditorium, 1650 Bedford Ave, Bklyn
institutinfo@mec.cuny.edu

7:30pm • \$4 Suggested donation
FILM: IDA B. WELLS: A PASSION FOR JUSTICE. A documentary about a radical African American journalist and anti-lynching crusader.
Freedom Hall, 113 W. 128 St.
socialism.com

WED FEB 20

9:30am-12:30pm • Free
WORKSHOP: "WORKING WITH UNDOCUMENTED YOUTH IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM."

Sponsored by the Juvenile Justice Project/Correctional Association of NY, at 80 Maiden Lane, 24th Fl training room,
RSVP: 212-254-5700
mfarquee@correctionalassociation.org

THU FEB 21

6-9pm • \$10 suggested/Free for Vets
BENEFIT: WINTER SOLDIER INVESTIGATION: IRAQ & AFGHANISTAN. Iraq Veterans Against the War benefit to raise money for upcoming March 13-16 investigation where vets will talk about war crimes they committed or witnessed in the Middle East.
New York Ethical Culture Society, 2 West 64th St (at Central Park West)
ivaw.org • wintersoldier@ivaw.org

FRI FEB 22

7:05pm • \$5 suggested
CONFERENCE: "DREAMING THE AMERICANS/THE BODY POLITIC IN PERFORMANCE." All day conference with discussion in the evening: "Plan Mexico: Impunity, the 'Drug War' & Human Rights in Mexico. Sponsored by NoPassport, Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts, and Translation Think Tank.
Bring photo ID.
CUNY Grad Center, 365 5th Ave, Martin E. Segal Theatre • 212-817-8215
web.gc.cuny.edu/mestc/programs/spring08/nopassport.html

Next Issue, February 22.

reader comments

Response to "A Crack Opens in Drug Law Sentencing," Jan. 12:

Mandatory minimum prison sentences have done little other than give the land of the free the highest incarceration rate in the world. The deterrent value of tough drug laws is grossly overrated. During the crack epidemic of the 1980s, New York City chose the zero tolerance approach, opting to arrest and prosecute as many offenders as possible. Meanwhile, Washington, D.C., Mayor Marion Barry was smoking crack and America's capital had the highest per capita murder rate in the country. Yet crack use declined in both cities simultaneously.

The decline was not due to a slick anti-drug advertising campaign or the passage of mandatory minimum sentencing laws. Simply put, the younger generation saw firsthand what crack

was doing to their older siblings and decided for themselves that crack was bad news. This is not to say nothing can be done about hard drugs like crack or methamphetamine, the latest headline grabber. Access to substance abuse treatment is critical. Diverting resources away from prisons and into cost-effective treatment would save both tax dollars and lives.

—ROBERT SHARPE, MPA

Response to "Voters Desperate for Solutions, Candidates Offer Soaring Rhetoric," Jan 12:

This is an okay article. It's indicative of radical media's combination of indifference and curiosity towards the horse race. This paper couldn't resist the attempt to get caught up in the horse race aspect of the campaign, but

knowing it is radical media, takes a stab at critique. What we get to read is an okay "on the ground" piece with some superficial analysis on the race. So you have good reporting and then you fall short on explaining it all to the reader.

—ANONYMOUS

Responses to "Populists Need Not Apply," Jan 12:

Populism does not equal principled stance. Neither presidential candidates Dennis Kucinich nor Ron Paul are populists. Poll watchers are populists. I've continually read Kucinich and Paul being described as populists, but they are not. Understanding the dangers of actual populism, where you pitch whatever ideas people most want to hear, and are willing to run roughshod over any law or rule that gets in the way, is very impor-

tant. Populism is dangerous: it is the promise of the tyranny of the majority on any subject.

Principled stances, like those of Kucinich, Gravel and Paul, are directly opposed to this. Most politicians are populists. These guys aren't going anywhere, largely because they aren't populists.

—JOHN



Continued on Page 15

Linking ‘The Dream’ to Today’s Reality

INTERVIEWS AND PHOTOS BY ALEX KANE

On Jan. 21, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, nearly 1,000 people marched in freezing weather from WABC headquarters on West 32nd Street to CNN headquarters on West 58th Street. They invoked King’s message of racial equality while focusing on present-day race relations, including the anti-immigrant sentiment espoused by CNN anchor Lou Dobbs, the NYPD shooting death of Sean Bell and the Jena Six case. *The Independent* caught up with some of the marchers, who discussed how they connected King’s message to present day struggles.



ERICA BRODY, BROOKLYN

“[I’m marching here today] because I believe that racism is one of the worst ills that we have in this country. I wanted to come out not only in support of ending racism, but all of the other intertwining oppressions. I’m out here getting signatures in support of same-sex marriage, looking to end homophobia and sexism and transphobia, as well as racism. It’s always great to see an incredible community of people out here for the same reasons. I think that Martin Luther King would be out here marching with us for all of these same issues. And I think the dream is being lived right now.”

FRANKIE CLARK, MANHATTAN

“As of now, [King’s message] has been watered down. It’s been watered down as a commodity ... If you look at fast food commercials, they’re talking about his dream, but they’re neglecting the rest of his speech. He actually spoke out against the Vietnam War ... Incidents like Sean Bell have occurred, [demonstrating] that there are persistent problems that are facing African Americans and other minorities in this country. It’s very deplorable. It needs to be talked about. And it needs to be acknowledged.”



DAEKWON YOUNG, BROOKLYN

“I’m here to be a part of the crowd and to stand for the rights of others...[The indignities that face African-Americans include] police brutality, injustice in the criminal system, inequality in the workforce and inequality of medical access for people with chronic illnesses. [King] would absolutely be in solidarity with us here because injustice for one is an injustice for all.”

FIGHTING FOR 125TH STREET

In response to the proposed rezoning of 125th Street in Central Harlem, approximately 60 people attended a Harlem Community Forum organized by the Harlem Tenants Council Jan. 23. Under a New York City Department of City Planning Proposal, 24 blocks along 125th Street in Harlem will be rezoned to “encourage the development of a regional business corridor by stimulating new investment as well as new arts, entertainment and retail activities,” according to an October 2007 Department of City Planning press release. In many cases, the rezoning will allow for higher-density residential and commercial development.

Six panelists discussed the Bloomberg proposal in stark terms, urging residents to fight back against the gentrification sweeping Harlem. Sikhulu Shange, owner of the Record Shack located on 125th Street, who is fighting his own battle against eviction, claimed Harlem was, “being prepared for the existence of the richest.” Michael Henry Adams, Harlem historian and author of the book, “Harlem Lost and Found,” said, “What is happening in Harlem now is poised to change the demographics of Harlem for the next hundred years.” According to Adams, the rezoning of Harlem will determine “whether Black, Latino, poor people or any non-rich people will live on Manhattan island” ever again.

—ALEX KANE



PHOTO: ALEX KANE



TINA, AL AWDA, PALESTINIAN RIGHT TO RETURN COALITION, SYRACUSE, NY

“I connect [the Palestinian struggle to Dr. King’s message] because the U.S. has ... a racist foreign policy that includes giving lots and lots of support to a state like Israel, [which] obviously is daily persecuting the Palestinians. [T]hat reflects [the U.S. government’s] attitude toward racism at home. When we have things like the Jena Six and Hurricane Katrina, that sort of racist policy is reflected internationally and domestically.”



TERESA GUTIERREZ, MAY 1ST COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT RIGHTS

“I’m marching because I think that if Martin Luther King were alive today that he would be marching for immigrant rights. And he would not be going along with the Lou Dobbs demonization of immigrant workers. The struggle to defend immigrant workers is a struggle against racism. And I think that we need to unite all the races, Black, Latin, Asian, Arab, white, in order to overcome all the problems that we have today. Martin Luther King talked about the war, against the war. [He] went to Memphis to fight for workers in Memphis. And we’ve got to continue that legacy.”

LOCAL

King’s Radical Roots

BY ALI WINSTON

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis on April 4, 1968, shortly before he was to lead a march of striking sanitation workers, part of his Poor People’s Campaign. Forty years later, King’s aborted cross-racial campaign for economic justice is seldom referenced, despite a record wealth gap between rich and poor today.

Interest in King’s radical legacy and drive for true change (not the saccharine variety pushed in this year’s presidential race) is nonetheless alive and well. On Jan. 20, more than 400 people attended WNYC’s panel discussion, “Embracing the Radical King: Prophetic or Passé?” at the Brooklyn Museum.

Moderated by WNYC radio host Brian Lehrer and April Yvonne Garrett, the president and founder of the non-profit Civic Frame, the panel featured Princeton Professor Eric Gregory, Brown Professors Tricia Rose and Corey Walker and Professor Patricia Williams of Columbia University’s Law School.

“There’s so much more to him than the few lines that are quoted in the reductionist media,” said Lehrer, who also noted, “really exploring the larger body of Martin Luther King’s work and his relevance today.”

Were he alive today, said Williams, King would have focused heavily on issues of voting power, the persuasive power of media and an ‘unraced’ political sphere. King would have expanded his notion of coalition to the new realities of a globalized world, and would have employed his strategy of nonviolent protest on new battlefields.

“Just imagining that makes him much more radical than anything I see happening it today’s world,” said Williams, envisioning King climbing the walls on the U.S.-Mexico border, marching alongside Pakistan’s lawyers, and standing hand-in-hand with Rachel Corrie against Israeli bulldozers.

However, Tricia Rose opined that the father of the Civil Rights Movement would be challenged and vexed by the entertainment industry’s “new minstrelsy” and the cannibalization of African-American culture and a burgeoning culture of violence in inner-city communities.

“I’m not sure he would expect so much capitulation to capitalism and a culture of violence,” Rose said, adding that the gains of the Civil Rights Movement have been met with 40 years of backsliding and sustained resistance by entrenched institutions of power.

Speaking on King’s role as a social ethicist, Gregory stressed the inclusive nature of King’s politics, which stand in sharp contrast to contemporary political strategies that target ‘niche’ voters. “King as a Christian represents an incredible mix of traditions. He didn’t have to be un-raced as a Christian, he didn’t use faith to exclude anyone from politics as we see it today,” said Gregory, adding that King never parsed personal charity from social justice.

King’s modern legacy, said Corey Walker, has been edited and presented to the country in a way that obscures the systematic, bottom-up critique of American society that his speeches and writing articulate.

“King challenges not only our comfort level,” said Walker, “[but] the very fabric of our society, a society where the rich continue to exploit the poor [and] where economics becomes the entrée to political power. It’s quite interesting that we’re in a moment where, if you don’t raise \$100 million, you’re not a viable candidate for the presidency.”

Rooftop Cop Shot Leaves Hole in Bed Stuy

BY RENEE FELTZ

Four years after the police shooting of Timothy Stansbury Jr., the unarmed African-American teenager’s death serves as a harsh reminder of officer impunity.

“Life goes on, but you don’t forget it,” said Tiffany Brown, who lives across the street from where Stansbury, 19, was shot in a Brooklyn housing project. “A cop can kill anyone and get away with it.”

Bedford Stuyvesant has the highest rate of fatal shootings by New York Police Department officers — five since 2000 — according to an analysis by *Color Lines* magazine. It is where police shot Kheil Coppin

last November when they mistook his hair-brush for a weapon.

“I shouldn’t be scared of the cops,” said Brown. “But it’s like the cops are programmed to kill.”

Officer Richard Neri Jr. and his partner encountered Stansbury around 1 a.m. on Jan. 24, 2004, during their vertical patrol on a rooftop in the Louis Armstrong Houses at 385 Lexington St.

When they came to the last stairwell Neri opened the door to head downstairs. Stansbury reached for the same doorknob as he and his friends took a rooftop shortcut.

Neri was patrolling with his gun out of its holster and his finger on the trigger

when Stansbury opened the door, according to police reports. The 11-year veteran of NYPD, who is Caucasian and from Long Island, said he was surprised to encounter Stansbury and accidentally shot him in the chest.

The day Stansbury died, NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly said there was “no justification for the shooting.” Newspaper tabloids splashed the word “Unjustified!” across their front pages.

Residents of the Louis Armstrong Houses referred to the shooting death of their former neighbor as a “rooftop murder.” They attended weekly vigils in order to keep the case in the news as prosecutors from the Brooklyn District Attorney’s office presented criminal charges against Neri to a grand jury.

But, in February 2004 a grand jury declined to indict Neri and he remained on desk duty at the NYPD’s Housing Division in Brooklyn. He was suspended in 2006 for 30 days, had his weapon permanently revoked, and transferred to the Property Clerk division.

Stansbury’s mother settled a \$2 million civil suit with the City in May 2007. She said she was still unhappy with the case because Officer Neri did not lose his job.

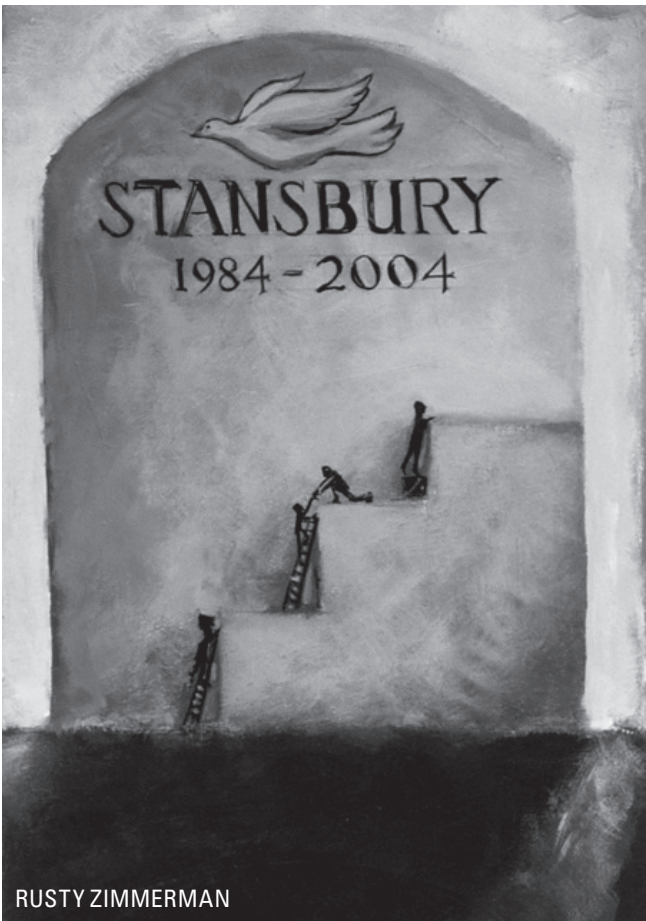
New York City Patrolmen's Benevolent Association spokesman Albert O'Leary said he knows Neri was significantly impacted by what happened, but cannot be more specific.

“No police officer comes to work saying I’m going to shoot somebody,” said O’Leary. “The vast majority of them never fire their weapon while on patrol.”

Standing behind Stansbury when he was struck was his best friend, Terrence Fisher, 19, who was a few months into directing a short documentary about gun violence in Bedford Stuyvesant called “Bullets in the Hood.”

“I could have picked up a gun, I could have rioted,” said Fisher, who has lost eight friends to gun violence. “Instead, I picked up a camera. I wanted to talk about Timothy and what was happening in my community.”

Friends borrowed Fisher's video camera



NYPD Shills Terror Bill

BY JONATHAN BENNETT

When air monitors have been outlawed, only outlaws will have air monitors!”

The slogan, which has become the unofficial rallying cry of an ad hoc coalition of labor unions, environmental groups, elected officials and community activists, was environmental activist Bob Gulack’s reaction when he heard a report about the New York City Police Department’s plan to require a permit for any independent environmental sampling used in the city.

A long list of organizations and individual activists all oppose the proposed law, known as Intro 650, which was unveiled by NYPD brass at the City Council’s Public Safety Committee Jan. 8 meeting.

The proposed legislation would make it a misdemeanor for anyone in New York City to own, or use, any device that measures chemical, biological or radiological contamination. Banned devices could include smoke and carbon-monoxide detectors, Geiger counters, and any device that collects and analyzes air or water samples for contamination without first obtaining a permit from NYPD.

It was the independently collected air samples in Lower Manhattan after 9/11 that debunked the claim by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that the air was safe to breathe.

Among those opposed to Intro 650 is U.S. Rep. Jerrold Nadler, whose congressional district includes the site of the World Trade Center. Testifying to the City Council, Nadler called the bill “a great potential to threaten the important contributions made by academic research institutions, unions, and environmental and community-based organizations that conduct independent chemical, biological and radiological environmental sampling.” Nadler is a leading proponent of federal legislation to provide healthcare to people now sick due to exposure of 9/11-related contamination.

The overriding question is why would NYPD want to control the use of air monitors and other environmental sampling equipment?

“Our mutual goal is to prevent false alarms and unnecessary public concern by making sure that we know where these de-

tectors are located and that they conform to standards of quality and reliability,” said Richard Falkenrath, NYPD Deputy Commissioner for Counter-Terrorism in his testimony for the bill.

The bill’s opponents call this justification for the bill a smokescreen. Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer noted that he had never heard of a false alarm caused by private environmental monitoring. “This is a fake emergency that doesn’t exist,” he said. “If it’s not a problem, let’s not try to create one.”

“As introduced, Intro 650 has the potential to adversely impact, delay or even prevent unions, environmental activists and others from doing the kind of work that is now done under the protection of laws such as the Occupational Safety and Health Act and the National Labor Relations Act,” said Dave Newman, an industrial hygienist with the non-profit New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health.

Also according to the police department’s testimony, the driving force behind the bill is the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The police testified that the federal government asked NYPD to lobby for the bill, with the intention of using the proposed New York City law as a model to be adopted by other cities and states.

In response to the strong opposition, the city prepared a revised version of the bill, which was made public Jan. 25. The revised bill exempts any detector that, “presents no significant possibility of triggering an alert of a possible biological, chemical or radiological weapons attack” from its requirements.

Despite the exemption for smoke detectors, opposition to the bill remains solid because it would require permits for almost all sampling equipment used by environmental and labor organizations to test for environmental degradation or dangerous working environments.

The bill has no provision for an appeal if the NYPD refuses to issue a permit, except to allow the applicant to submit an amended application.

Jonathan Bennett is a former Public Affairs Director with the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH). For more info, nycosh.org.

50-Shot Cops Duck Jury Trial in Sean Bell Case

More than a year after Sean Bell was killed by a barrage of police bullets on the night before his wedding, the chance for justice in his case remain uncertain.

After a 10-minute hearing on Jan. 25, State Supreme Court Judge Arthur Cooperman agreed to a request by the three police officers indicted in Bell’s shooting to hold a bench trial in their case, sparing them from having to face a jury trial. The decision came just two days after an appeals court turned down a request by defense lawyers to move the trial outside of New York City.

“Now that their motion to change the venue has been denied, they do not want to face a jury of their peers. We are prepared, though, to proceed in any case with our pursuit of justice,” Bell family advocate Rev. Al Sharpton told the *New York Daily News*.

Bell, a 23-year-old African American, was killed outside a Queens nightclub on Nov. 25, 2006, when five undercover police detectives fired a total of 50 shots at him and two of his friends, who were both seriously wounded. All three men were unarmed. Three of the five police officers — Michael Oliver, Gescard F. Isnora and Marc Cooper — were indicted. Oliver and Isnora face manslaughter charges while Cooper faces a lesser charge of reckless endangerment. Bell’s fiancée, Nicole Paultre Bell, is also pursuing a civil lawsuit against the officers.

For more information, visit justiceforsean.net

—ERIN THOMPSON

Return of the Winter Soldier

By ERIN THOMPSON

IRAQ VETS PREPARE ATROCITY TESTIMONY



A scene from *Winter Soldier*, the 1971 documentary about Vietnam Veterans who testified about atrocities they saw or committed.

Afghanistan wars.

During the series of panels, multimedia presentations and testimony, more than 45 current and former soldiers plan to describe the indiscriminate killing and injuring of civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan, the use of chemical weapons, the torture and killing of detainees, rape — within the military itself and against Iraqi civilians — the denial of medical care to the injured and the mutilation of the dead, and other war crimes. Iraqi and Afghani civilians, as well as reporters not embedded with the military, are scheduled to verify many of the stories that will be described by the soldiers.

The goal of hearings, named the Winter Soldier Investigation: Iraq and Afghanistan, after the 1971 Vietnam-era investigation of the same name, is to show that systematic government policies are to blame for the myriad atrocities in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“It’s easy for the military to ostracize soldiers. We want to demonstrate that the policies that are set at the highest level are what’s creating the reality on the ground,” said New York City IVAW chapter President Jose Vasquez. “Soldier after soldier, rotation after rotation, these policies are what’s creating the environment in which these atrocities occur.”

“When other vets are willing to discuss some of the negative things, it shows people that it is not just an isolated event,” said Michael Harmon, a U.S. Army veteran who served in Iraq from 2003 to 2004. Harmon

pointed to the standard operating procedure of shooting any Iraqi civilian carrying a shovel at night, “because they might have been planting IEDs” and the impunity afforded to soldiers who killed civilians as examples of policies that lead to atrocities.

Harmon remembers watching U.S. soldiers shoot a 2-year-old girl in the leg. “An IED went off and soldiers starting spraying bullets in all directions. The little girl was caught in the crossfire while driving in her family car.”

Harmon, who has coped with substance abuse issues since leaving the military in 2005, was one of the first members of IVAW to be interviewed for the hearings, despite the fact that, “I don’t like to think about the war when I don’t have to. It is just a horrible, misguided debacle.”

While IVAW is taking inspiration and learning from the 1971 Winter Soldier Investigation, they acknowledge that they are dealing with a “a different world, a different war,” said Vasquez. To collect testimony, IVAW initially based their questions on the 1971 questionnaire. However, they soon found that many of the questions needed to be updated; the questionnaire is now more than nine pages long, after starting at only two. They are also taking steps to provide psychological counseling to any soldier who testifies, in the hopes of avoiding the sharp increase in suicides that occurred after the 1971 testimonies.

In addition, in 1971, when Vietnam veterans holed up in a Detroit motel to describe a litany of atrocities they had experienced and carried out during the U.S. war

in Southeast Asia, there was a near media blackout. A documentary film was eventually created using the testimony, but “had there not been a documentary, I don’t think we’d even know about the [1971 investigation],” said Vasquez.

In this age of instant communication and prolific independent media, IVAW has put out a call to artists, journalists, filmmakers and other media makers to help spread testimony from the hearings.

While IVAW hopes that the experiences of soldiers will help inform the public and politicians’ ideas about the reality of the war, the group’s strategy is mainly on reaching those who can most directly stop the war: active-duty soldiers and their families.

“Our target audience is GIs,” said Vasquez, who explained that by fomenting resistance within the military and within military families, IVAW is in a unique position to undermine the continuation of U.S. war policies. “We thought long and hard about what are we best positioned to do, we realized that there are very few antiwar organizations that have the ability to do outreach among the GIs.”

IVAW will hold a New York Winter Soldier benefit Feb. 21, 6-9pm at the New York Ethical Culture Society, 2 West 64th Street at Central Park West. \$10 suggestion donation, free for all veterans. For more information, or if you are a media maker that wants to get involved, visit ivaw.org or email wintersoldier@ivaw.org.

War And Its Discontents: Understanding Iraq And The U.S. Empire



Featuring:
Bill Fletcher, Jr.

Co-founder of Center for Labor Renewal
and former president of TransAfrica Forum

Naomi Klein*

Author of *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*
*invited, not yet confirmed

Zachary Lockman

Historian of the Middle East, New York University; and former
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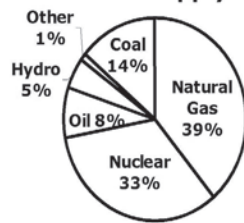
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A BETTER WAY TO STIMULATE

There are two broad ways to critique the proposed \$150 billion stimulus package. One, are the details correct? Currently, the government is waiting until after tax season to mail out rebate checks. This means many Americans will pay taxes to the IRS by April 15, and then get a tax rebate months later. Instead of having Americans mail money back and forth with Uncle Sam, there could just be an assessment that lowers the tax burden on target recipients. This would speed the policy, reduce administrative costs and lower America's tax burden. It would be a less effective vote-buying plan.

Excluding low-wage earners and the unemployed, which the plan does, makes no sense. We know much of the stimulus will be diverted to taxes and savings or used to purchase imported goods, all of which blunt positive economic effects. We could target lower income folks with bigger rebates. These folks will not and can not save and make so little that they escape taxation on income. More bang, less buck is always the better course.

A wiser plan might invest in retraining and education for displaced workers. As the great housing boom busts, people need assistance in switching out of housing-related work.

The second way of critiquing the stimulus is to zoom out and survey the economy. Doing so presents more radical alternatives. Refunding taxes is likely slow and short sighted and not the most optimal solution. A better use of money would be to fix our decaying infrastructure.

The American Society of Civil Engineers reports that our national infrastructure has been neglected to the point of imperiling life, restricting freedom of movement and creating a drag on commerce. Our roads, bridges, levees, dams and water treatment systems are slumbering weapons of massive destruction.

The estimated minimum cost of upgrading our infrastructure is \$1.6 trillion. A 10 percent roll-out of critical action would be a stimulus about the size of the proposed \$150 billion plan. Funds can be distributed through state, local and federal agencies, and will absorb some people and equipment displaced from building and related trades. It is a long-term uniting investment that is overdue. This could give us cleaner water, an improved environment, safer transit systems and lower-cost more competitive production infrastructure.

We could even begin to build a national public transit system like our European and Asian rivals already have. That would reduce both our use of imported oil and greenhouse gas emissions.

I know there are many problems with this. In the end a safer modern infrastructure, reduced oil imports and a cleaner environment pale in comparison to half a mortgage payment, a new TV or a shopping spree at Walmart.

Every crisis is an opportunity to ask the big questions about what went wrong and how we can build a future better than the present. If we don't, future generations may deem us insane for doing the same thing and expecting a different result.

—MFW



GARY MARTIN

GEE

BY MAX FRAAD WOLFF

Amid a slumping economy, our selfless agents in Washington have a series of stimulating ideas to get votes. Oops, I mean to help hard working families that vote. Help how? They will be sending tax rebates that should arrive in June, around the time the presidential election shifts into high gear. Along with the checks are various assistances to business, which should help our political leaders with fundraising and media coverage.

The White House proposal is to distribute \$600 to individual taxpayers and \$1,200 to households. The average range for a monthly mortgage payment is \$1,800 to \$2,400, including related costs. The average minimum monthly credit card payment is \$400. This gives you an idea of how vital and massive the assistance will be. Of the \$150 billion proposed stimulus, around \$100 billion would go to individuals and the rest to businesses to encourage investment spending.

But before examining the stimulus plan, we need to peek in on the slump that is inspiring all this stimulation.

HOW THE ECONOMY TANKED

The economy has been wheezing for several months, most visibly with severe weakness in housing. Across the nation all things related to homes have been heading down, down, down. New building permits have fallen. Sales of existing homes have fallen. Sales of new homes have fallen. Home prices have fallen. Retail sales related to all things for the home have fallen. Jobs in construction, retail, realty and household finance have been vanishing at a rapid clip. It's likely that we are less than halfway through our housing difficulties.

Financial markets have suffered as builders,

bankers and retailers have seen their stock prices and profits tumble. Home buyers, car buyers and credit card holders are increasingly paying late or missing payments. Many creditors have and will likely continue to report massive losses. This kind of pain, pain for banks, financial firms and large investors, registers quickly in Washington. Much assistance has been given to distressed financial institutions. Meetings have been held, mergers facilitated and massive quantities of cash — hundreds of billions — has been made available.

The Treasury Department and Federal Reserve have led these efforts. The Fed has slashed interest rates five times since last fall, most recently a 0.5 percent cut on Jan. 30. The cuts apply to interest rates banks get when borrowing from the Fed and interest rates bank charge each other to borrow reserves. So far this has only slowed and softened our descent. Interestingly, these actions were fast and very large and are ongoing.

BORROWING AGAINST THE FUTURE

Less obvious to those inside the Beltway has been growing pain in American households. Well over a quarter million people lost their homes in the second half of 2007. More than a million Americans could face foreclosure in 2008. Tough times mean Americans have been spending less and many have been pushed off the debt cliff.

With stagnant wages and rising prices, millions kept up middle class spending by turning their homes into ATMs. Between 2002 and August 2007 we borrowed an addition \$4.4 trillion in home loans. This almost matches precisely the total increase in disposable income — all types of income to all people — of \$4.5 trillion during the same period! That is how we ended up with a big, fat, dragging slump and \$10.4 trillion in home mortgage debt.

How do we dig our way out of the slump?

From Bubble to Rubble
\$10 Trillion Home Mortgage Debt Tanks Economy

Stimulation. This means the government spends more and, or taxes less. Either way, our deficit grows. If the government cuts taxes it reduces its revenues. If the government increases spending it pays out more money. In both cases the budget deficit rises and the government borrows more.

The idea of more borrowing for consumer spending is based on years of responding to economic trouble with more borrowing and more spending. Present plans bring to mind a great quote from Albert Einstein: "Insanity is doing the same thing and expecting a different result."

The stimulus package is modest in size, scope and likelihood of success. Fiscal policies like these require months to have broad economic effects — if they work at all. Losses in wealth from one hour of turbulence in the markets often exceed \$150 billion. And the stimulus proposal represents just 0.7 percent of the value of America's \$21 trillion in real estate holdings. If house prices continue to decline, this will dwarf the best case results of the stimulus package outlined. Nonetheless, these plans have symbolic value that is important and will help some of the affected parties. Something beats nothing.

I am not excited about the stimulus, however. Giving more money to consumers and having Uncle Sam borrow the difference is a poor cure. Our larger more structural problems stem already from too much consumer spending and massive government debt, \$9.2 trillion at this moment.

If we really need to free up funds to assist the public, perhaps we could raise some money by trimming our expensive war habit in Iraq.

Max Fraad Wolff is an economist who teaches in The New School University's Graduate Program in International Affairs. His international economics and finance strategy work appears regularly online, including the websites The Asia Times, The Huffington Post, Global MacroScope, The Prudent Bear and Seeking Alpha.

DEMS THROW PENNIES TO END POVERTY

While there are differences of strategy and focus, the Democratic presidential contenders favor homeowner relief, extended unemployment benefit, food stamps, Medicaid funding and state and local grant aid. Some economists contend these types of aid, particularly to the unemployed, create the biggest bang for the stimulus buck by generating more economic activity, but virtually all of these proposals have been excluded during negotiations on the plan.

John Edwards announced a stimulus plan last November. Before dropping out of the race, he campaigned on issues of poverty and called for shifting taxes onto high-income earners, increasing corporate taxes and other progressive economic policies. Edwards's focus was on poverty and economic assistance to the needy to a greater degree than the media-indulged platitudes of the two leading Democratic candidates.

The Clinton and Obama plans, like their voting records, are similar. Clinton's \$70 billion plan is slightly smaller, more complex and more specific. Obama's plan for \$75 billion is simpler and closer to the White House-backed plan awaiting the Senate green light. Clinton apportioned more money to distressed homeowners, \$30 billion versus \$10 billion for Obama. Both, rhetorically at least, sought to extend and expand unemployment insurance. Neither fought hard.

Sen. Clinton offers \$5 billion in energy assistance as part of her detailed Five-Part Plan and proposes an additional \$40 billion in further rebates if the economy continues to weaken. Sen. Obama suggested an initial round of \$250 per individual and \$500 per family tax rebate assistance, with more to follow if unemployment rises consistently.

—MFW

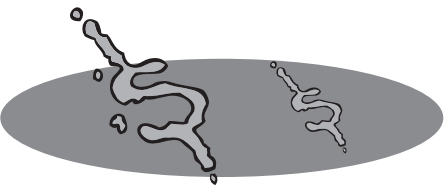


How Wall Street Killed the Economy

By A.K. GUPTA

THE “SUBPRIME MORTGAGE” MANIA began in 2004 when lenders started giving out mortgages to almost anyone — with little or no proof of income — because of profits that could be made off fees, high interest rates and reselling the mortgages. To sell subprime loans, lenders gave low rates for the first two years.

After this the mortgage rate would shoot up, sometimes doubling or even tripling monthly payments.



CAUGHT BETWEEN STAGNANT WAGES AND RAPIDLY INCREASING HOUSE VALUES, Americans turned their homes into cash machines this decade and withdrew trillions of dollars in equity. By last year, many subprime loans were resetting at higher rates and homeowners started to default. This cooled off the housing market fast. Jobs were lost in real estate, construction and home lending, and retail spending slowed, slowing the economy.

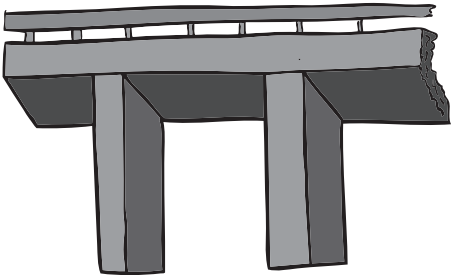


and foreign investors. You get your cash back, and a steady stream of fees for managing the mortgages. To sell MBSs, you go to a ratings agency like Moody's Investor's Service or Standard & Poor's. You slice up the bundle like cuts of beef. The choicest MBSs get Aaa ratings, meaning they will almost certainly be paid back. The ratings go down — Aa, A, Baa, down to Ccc and then unrated — according to the likelihood they will be paid back.

As lenders were writing trillions of dollars in mortgages to sell, not to hold, they didn't

have an interest in seeing the loan repaid.

THEN, LENDERS TOOK RISKY MORTGAGE BACKED SECURITIES (rated Bbb, for instance) and repackaged them as highly attractive Aaa financial products. Some of these are called “collateralized debt obligations” or CDO. Ratings firms generated huge profits from giving these dodgy products the seal of approval. Moody's earned nearly \$850 million from structured finance products in 2006 alone.



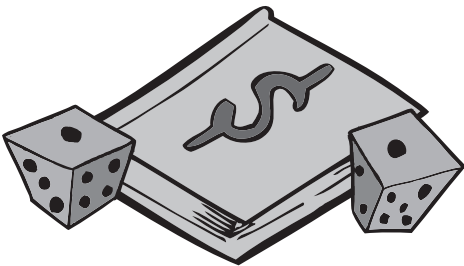
THE FINAL PLAYER IS “MONOLINE” INSURANCE COMPANIES, which insure more than \$1 trillion in municipal bonds. If a city wants to build new schools or roads or expand mass transit it sells bonds. To lower costs, a city buys insurance from monoline insurers, such as MBIA or Ambac. This makes the bond more desirable to the buyer because the



insurer will pay out if the city defaults.

JUST AS LENDERS PUSHED RISKY SUBPRIME MORTGAGES, MONOLINE INSURERS STARTED INSURING MORTGAGE BACKED SECURITIES. An example shows how this works. Suppose your company is Goldman Sachs. GM wants to borrow \$100 million. You give it a loan at 5 percent interest, which means they pay \$5 million a year in interest. To be sure your loan is safe you buy insurance from MBIA. Deciding GM is a good risk, MBIA sells you the policy at 1 percent. So while GM pays you \$5 million a year, you pay MBIA \$1 million a year to assume the risk. If GM defaults on the loan, MBIA will cover the loss.

THESE INSURANCE CONTRACTS ARE KNOWN AS “CREDIT DEFAULT SWAPS.” Taking the example above, GM starts bleeding money and can't service its debt. This causes the value of your loan to decline, but the value of your insurance contract, the credit default swap, rises because it's more likely it will have to



be paid out.

HERE'S WHERE THINGS GET NUTTY. An unregulated market, totaling a breathtaking \$45 trillion, grew up as banks, hedge funds, brokers and insurers sold these swaps back and forth. It's pure gambling, where buyers and sellers often do not hold the underlying debt. As hundreds of thousands of homeowners began defaulting on subprime loans, many MBSs started going bad, too. By last year, there was \$1.3 trillion in CDOs worldwide and 56 percent of this was made up of mortgage backed securities.

BY LAST YEAR, ONE SMALL MONOLINE INSURER, ACA, HAD ACCUMULATED MORE THAN \$69 BILLION IN EXPOSURE TO CORPORATE AND MORTGAGE DEBT BUT ONLY HAD \$425 MILLION OF CAPITAL TO COVER IT. Ratings agencies also review insurance firms, and ACA had a single A rating. Then it reported a loss of \$1 billion last November from MBSs. A month later, it was downgraded to a junk rating of Ccc.

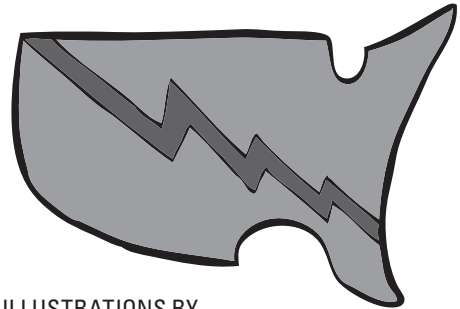
THIS MADE ACA'S INSURANCE POLICIES WORTHLESS, affecting the value of the debt they insured. Fearful this could lead to a market panic as players tried to “unwind” their swaps, banks have been negotiating to rescue the insurer, but already Merrill Lynch, CIBC and Citigroup have written off billions of dollars in losses linked to ACA. Losses this year on swaps could total \$250 billion, equal to the expected losses in the subprime market.



THE DAMAGE IS SPREADING ON WALL STREET WITH LARGE JOB CUTS IN FINANCE AND A CREDIT CRUNCH that's making it harder for businesses and homeowners to borrow. This creates more problems. As foreclosures multiply and property values decline, many cities and states are facing huge tax shortfalls. On the cusp of recession, they have to borrow more money to fund operations. But as monoline insurers are downgraded, the cost of insuring municipal

bonds goes up. In addition to the blow of a recession, Americans will see government services slashed and having to pay more for the services that remain.

WALL STREET MADE STAGGERING PROFITS FROM THE HOUSING AND CREDIT BUBBLES. Now that they're taking a beating, the Federal Reserve and U.S. Treasury Department are bailing them out on the public's dime by pumping tens of billions of dollars into the market and by lowering interest rates, which fuels inflation. Thus, profit is private, but losses are socialized. Such is the free market.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY FRANK REYNOSO

GLOSSARY

BOND—a bond is an instrument of debt issued by corporations and governments. For example, Boeing issues \$1 million bonds with a 20-year maturity at 5 percent. This means the buyer purchases the bond for \$1 million, gets 5 percent interest per year (\$50,000) for 20 years, and at the end gets paid back the principal of \$1 million.

COLLATERALIZED DEBT OBLIGATION—a complex security that can be based on a wide variety of debts such as mortgages, credit card debt, auto loans, etc.



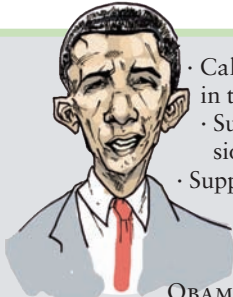
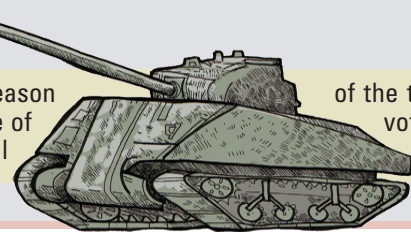


MORTGAGE BACKED SECURITIES—are either commercial or residential mortgages that are bundled to create a bond. The pool of mortgages acts as asset for the MBS and generates cash payments to the buyers in the form of interest and principal from the mortgages.

SUBPRIME MORTGAGES—sometimes labeled “predatory lending,” this means greater than the prime rate, currently 6.5 percent, which is the lowest interest rate banks offer to their best customers.

The Indy's Guide to the Primaries

COMPILED BY JESSICA LEE
ILLUSTRATIONS BY GINO BARZIZZA

While Democratic candidates are promising “change” after seven years of the Bush administration’s policies, what the candidates say, and what they actually mean, are two different things. Now that the primary field has been narrowed to a Clinton-Obama scuffle, *The Independent* takes a look at the dismal reality of two leading candidates’ platforms. For comparison, we also look at the positions of John Edwards and Dennis Kucinich, who recently dropped their presidential bids. Edwards and Kucinich will still be on the ballot in New York’s Feb. 5 Democratic primary.

HILLARY CLINTON	BARACK OBAMA	JOHN EDWARDS	DENNIS KUCINICH
<div>ENVIRONMENT</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calls for 60 billion gallons of homegrown biofuels to be available for use in vehicles in the United States by 2030• Supports a cap-and-trade system to cut U.S. emissions 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050• Supports “clean coal” and coal-to-liquid fuels if they emit 20 percent less carbon than conventional fuels• Does not want to emphasize nuclear power as an energy source unless waste-storage and other problems are solved</div> <div></div> <div>While the positions advocated by the leading Democrats may sound appealing to voters — they do little to address the urgency of global climate change, and do not solve any of the underlying causes. Climate scientists claim that reducing carbon emissions by 70 percent by 2050 will still result in a 3.6 degree Fahrenheit increase in global temperatures. Experts say that a biofuel “solu-</div> <div>WAR</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Voted for Iraq war in 2002 and subsequent re-authorizations of force and funding through 2007• Now supports phased withdrawal of some, but not all, troops by 2013• Voted in favor of sanctions against Iran and the decision to list an Iranian military unit as a terrorist organization• Supports dramatic increase in the Pentagon’s budget and expansion of the size of the military• Received \$52,600 in campaign donations from the five largest U.S. arms manufacturers</div> <div>While overwhelming opposition to the war in Iraq was cited as a main reason for voters’ rejection of Republican candidates in the 2006 elections, none of the leading Democratic candidates have proposed immediate withdrawal</div> <div>HEALTHCARE</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proposed plan will require every U.S. citizen to obtain private health insurance• Plan will be subsidized by employers, public funding and the elimination of tax cuts for households earning more than \$250,000• Supports strengthening Medicaid and State Children’s Health Insurance Program• Has received \$269,436 from pharmaceuticals/health products industry in the 2008 election cycle</div> <div></div> <div>CLINTON</div> <div>If you are one of the tens of millions without healthcare, don’t fret. Clinton and Edwards aim to create universal healthcare not by addressing a failed system, but rather by making it illegal to not have health insurance. Their plans will recreate on a nationwide scale the failed healthcare plan of former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, which will slap \$1,000+ fines on residents who do</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calls for 60 billion gallons of biofuels to be produced in the United States each year by 2030• Supports a cap-and-trade system to cut U.S. emissions 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050• Supports “clean coal” and coal-to-liquid fuels if they emit 20 percent less carbon conventional fuels• Supports nuclear power and has received campaign donations from nuclear power companies</div> <div></div> <div>OBAMA</div> <div>Publicly opposed the Iraq invasion, in his first two years as a U.S. Senator he voted for every war funding request totaling \$300 billion.</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Voted against a 2006 bill to begin withdrawing troops out of Iraq by July 2007• Claims as president that he will “immediately begin to remove our troops from Iraq” but refuses to pledge that all troops will leave by 2013• Supports direct negotiations with Iran, but says all options should be on the table, including military force</div> <div></div> <div>of the troops before 2013. As senators, Clinton, Edwards and Obama voted to continue funding and authorizing the war.</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proposes a new national “affordable” health plan that would include guaranteed eligibility, portability and subsidy for those who do not qualify for Medicaid• Plan will be subsidized by employers, public funding and the elimination of tax cuts for households earning more than \$250,000• Allows individuals to opt out, which means healthy individuals are less likely to purchase insurance, raising the cost for everyone else• Will require that all children have healthcare coverage• Will expand eligibility for the Medicaid and State Children’s Health Insurance Program programs• Has received \$261,784 from the pharmaceuticals/health products industry</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proposed plan will require everyone to obtain health insurance by law• Plan will be subsidized by employers, public funding and the elimination of tax cuts for households earning more than \$200,000• Will create regional private “Health Care Markets” that must include at least one public plan• Expand Medicaid and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program</div> <div></div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supports a universal single-payer not-for-profit healthcare plan for everyone, “Medicare for All”• Plan would eliminate insurers and use a single-payer tax pool to fund healthcare providers directly• Co-sponsored the “Medicare for All” bill (H.R. 676: The U.S. National Health Insurance Act) in the U.S. House of Representatives</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supports a merit-based pay plan of offering raises (up to \$5,000) for teachers who improve their classes in under-served schools• Supports creating a “West Point-like” academy to train teachers• Supports reforming NCLB, after having voted for it as senator</div> <div></div> <div>EDWARDS</div> <div>pay” based on students’ performances on standardized testing, is also a contentious issue among educators. In contrast, Kucinich’s education agenda is part of a larger plan to reprioritize values in America, including addressing inequities rooted in race, class, gender and sexual preference discrimination that pervade the classroom. Noting that only 2.9 percent of the budget is spent on education, Kucinich would slice the pie differently, giving less money to war and more to peace initiatives, which include taking care of America’s youth.</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Says biofuel research must be balanced with global agricultural and environmental concerns• Supports a phase-out of all coal power and coal mining• Supports complete phase-out of all nuclear power plants, and for more stringent regulation of nuclear waste• Proposes “Global Green Deal” to create sustainable energy production in United States and with partner developing nations• Proposes “Works Green Administration” to provide new jobs and stimulate the economy• Supports signing the Kyoto Treaty</div> <div></div> <div>KUCINICH</div> <div>Voted against Iraq War in 2002 and has subsequently voted against every bill authorizing more troops and money</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• His “Strength through Peace” agenda includes defunding the war and withdrawing troops immediately• Supports direct diplomacy with Iran and opposes military action; claims U.S. must disarm its own nuclear program• Voted against the Iran sanctions and to list a state military unit as a terrorist organization• Proposed to create a U.S. Department of Peace</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Voted for the Iraq War in 2002 and continued to support the war by voting for funding and reauthorizations of force through 2005; renounced his vote to invade Iraq during the 2004 presidential campaign;• Proposes immediately withdrawing 40,000 to 50,000 combat troops; refuses to pledge to remove all troops by 2013• Favors direct negotiations with Iran, but has criticized the Bush administration and United Nations for not being confrontational enough</div>			

The Republicans Have Already Won

By A.K. GUPTA

In another life, Rudy Giuliani’s only brush with public notoriety would have been in an orange-jumpsuited, shackled perp walk for setting fire to a dog. An unstable bundle of petty vindictiveness and sadism, complemented by vampirish hairdo and grin, he instead brushed the heights of power. But that’s now all unraveled with his failed presidential bid.

Rudy was supposed to be the Republicans’ king in waiting. Once he entered the contest, so went conventional wisdom, he would glide to the nomination, combining a tough-on-terror pose with 9/11 celebrity and crossover voter appeal.

It was not to be. Giuliani’s packaging could not hide his foibles: estranged children, Bernard Kerik, having the city pay for mistress protection and then trying to cover the accounting trail.

His troubles are symptomatic of the GOP’s existential crisis. Despite a large field of presidential contenders, no one has united the base. The Republicans’ problem is they embody an exhausted ideology that they are unable to repudiate.

Reagan and Bush both united the right under a big tent that sheltered crazies of all sorts, those who believed government is always bad or our fair nation, is being overrun by mud people or reverence for life does not extend beyond the womb or greed is good.

Now, however, the Republicans have split into deranged factions that remain powerful. Each candidate has to preach orthodoxy to appeal to a right-wing group, but they have little hope of winning over the broader electorate because the public has tired of the fanaticism.

Huckabee wooed evangelicals with his talk of the Constitution reflecting “God’s standards.” Ron Paul is the libertarians’ darling because he wants to abolish the IRS. Tancredo’s bloviations about immigration threatening our culture appealed to nativists. Giuliani’s “Islamofascism” rhetoric has won the hearts of the Muslim haters. And Romney’s business background secured the support of free-market zealots.

The one Republican bucking the trend, John McCain, is the one despised by conservatives because he strays from party orthodoxy on immigration, campaign finance reform and global warming. But McCain is no moderate, as much as he cultivates the image. Whoever emerges victorious from the Republican scrum will be weighed down

in the general election by Bush because they all support the same failed policies.

For 30 years, many Americans have drank the conservative Kool-Aid: that cutting taxes on the super wealthy would trickle down to improved middle class life; that endless war would bring peace; that the private sector would solve every crisis from healthcare to climate change; that finger-pointing piety was preferable to welfare for easing the burdens of poverty.

This led to the eight-year-long disaster called Bush. The next president will face grinding wars abroad and economic decline at home. Most Americans have wised up to the insanity: that more of the same is not going to produce different results. The Republicans have not, and as such, don’t have a reason to be any more. Few are moved by a platform of more prayer, more war and more wealth to the super-rich.

The ultimate reason the Republicans are exhausted is because they won the historical battle a long time ago. The Reagan Revolution ushered in neoliberalism, the economic doctrine that all relations must be subject to market forces, which came to fruition under Clinton. He gave us the North American Free Trade Agreement, the end of welfare, deregulation of industry, finance and media, downsizing of government, faith-based social services,

and the privatization of prisons, education and warfare. Bush just added to this. Sure his administration gave neoliberalism a personal touch with corrupt crony capitalism from the Gulf of Mexico to the Persian Gulf, but Enron was a Clinton-era byproduct. Bush may have made real the high-tech police state, but the Democrats embrace it eagerly. Desperate for change, the public appears willing to back Democrats in Republican clothing. Clinton and Obama

look to the market to solve healthcare by mandates and global warming by carbon trading, plus they reject withdrawal from Iraq and issue threats against Iran. They may tinker at the edges and tone down the holy war rhetoric against Muslims, immigrants and gays, but war, economic instability and global ecocide will continue.

If there is a real difference, it’s that they’re not as deranged as the Republicans. And that’s what this election comes down to.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LEO GARCIA

DON’T JUST VOTE, TAKE ACTION!

WAR

1. **Military Counter-Recruitment:** Stop the militarization of America’s youth and keep them from joining the war machine. Visit counterrecruitmentguide.org, courageo-resist.org, warresisters.org, youthandthemilitary.org.
2. **Reduce Oil Consumption:** Resource wars are only going to intensify. Quash the demand. It’s not just gasoline, oil is used to make thousands of products that could be made with sustainable materials. Get educated.

HEALTHCARE

3. **Support the movement for universal, single-payer healthcare** (H.R. 646)! Visit healthcare-now.org.
4. **Kick corporate America out of your body and take charge of your own health.** Holistic, preventive healthcare is part of the growing popular health movement. Educate yourself at your local bookstore and listen to great health programs on WBAI (99.5FM). Visit rockdove-collective.org, radherb.org, wbai.org.

ENVIRONMENT

5. **Join the campaign to stop new coal-powered power plants.** Visit ran.org, sierraclub.org, risingtide-northamerica.org.
6. **Consume less.**
7. **Eat locally.** Most food crosses 1,200 to 2,500 miles before it is consumed. Visit justfood.org, greenapplemap.org, cenyc.org, freegan.info.

EDUCATION

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—JESSICA LEE

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

Clintons Exploit Black-Latino Tensions

By AL GIORDANO

LAS VEGAS—The chairs in the Concorde Ballroom of the Paris Casino were arranged as if for a wedding, but were more a prelude to an ugly divorce.

On one side of the at-large caucus room were supporters, mostly Mexican American, of Sen. Hillary Clinton, led by an organizer for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) .

On the other side of the aisle were supporters, overwhelmingly African American, of Sen. Barack Obama, led by a shop steward for the Culinary Workers Local 226.

Both groups participating in the Jan. 19 Nevada caucus were made up predominantly of women. They shouted at each other, booed, hissed and hurled thumbs down in open, sneering contempt for the opposition. The hostility toward their sister workers on each side had more to do with each other than with the candidates they supported.

Capitalism and its politicians have long played divide and conquer to divide immigrants from other economically suppressed demographic groups. A generation or two ago, Irish, Italians and Jews were bunched by those in power into the same congressional, legislative and city council districts to compete for the same scraps of political representation while White Anglo-Saxon Protestants took the rest of the pie. The same has occurred in recent years as Blacks and Latinos — the two most solid Democratic Party voting demographic groups — have been shoehorned into increasing conflict.

As census trends explode to bring, just two or so decades from now, the Caucasian population of the United States into minority status, entire industries have been launched to prevent a majority alliance from forming along class-solidarity lines. There are book contracts aplenty waiting for divisive pundits like Earl Ofari Hutchison, author of *The Emerging Black GOP Majority* (2006) and *Latino Challenge to Black America* (2007). Black-Latino tensions bubble up from high school brawls in Los Angeles to City Council antics in Buffalo to the prison system where gangs often choose up sides along ethnic and racial lines.

But now it's exploded out into the open in the Democratic presidential nomination battle, with the Clinton campaign leading the charge.

Remarkably, the race baiting has had little effect on white voters who would be expected to bite, particularly those in rural areas — considered by white urban and suburban liberals to be the racist ones — who in Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada delivered bigger percentages for Obama than urban and suburban voters. But perhaps white folks were never the intended target of such divisive politics. No, it led, instead, to the Black-Latino divide on display in Las Vegas, one that could cause lasting harm to all progressive efforts — electoral or not — in the near future of the United States of America.

THE CLINTON WHITE HOUSE VS. MEXICAN-AMERICANS

While president from 1989 to 1993, George H. W. Bush tried to gain approval for a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico and Canada. Just as Ronald Reagan tried before him, he couldn't convince a Democratic -controlled Congress to go along. That magic trick required the Democratic regime of Bill Clinton — backed by a multi-million dollar corporate lobbying campaign — which rammed NAFTA through.

NAFTA took effect in 1994. It soon devastated Mexican family farmers, many of whom fled across the U.S. border while many more were displaced into Mexican cities and border states to work in sweatshops. That, in turn, sparked a marked increase in undocumented workers in the United States, who are now on the receiving end of the same repressive policies and media-fed demonization that were perfected against African-Americans.

In 1993, when President Bill Clinton took office, there were 80,815 men and women in federal prisons. By the end of his two terms, in De-



cember 2000, there were 125,692: an increase of 55 percent over eight years, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Clinton administration's criminalization of the economically poor fell heaviest upon Hispanic-Americans. By 1997, more than halfway through the Clinton White House years, 27 percent of federal inmates were Hispanic (compared to 17 percent of state level inmates). By 2000, 43 percent of all federal drug war prisoners were Hispanic, the most likely group to be first-time offenders, and the least likely to have committed a violent crime. (If anything, these numbers undercount the real impact, since most Hispanic inmates are classified by the prison system as "white.")

Contrary to what CNN's Lou Dobbs says, these Hispanic prisoners are not primarily "illegal immigrants." U.S. born Hispanic men are seven times as likely to end up in prison than foreign-born Hispanic men.

And during Clinton's presidency, the White House made no effort to reform immigration laws or set a path to citizenship for the millions of new immigrants streaming across the border as a result of NAFTA. President George W. Bush has been more progressive on immigration than Clinton ever was.

But after winning the New Hampshire primary, Clinton

went to Nevada and made a noisy public play for Latino voters. She walked through a predominantly Hispanic north Las Vegas neighborhood as her first post-New Hampshire media appearance, and noshed guacamole and chips at the Lindo Michoacan restaurant. During that session, with the TV cameras running, a man shouted, "my wife is illegal." (What man, if his wife is truly in the country without permission, would advertise that fact on national television? The Clinton campaign had been caught earlier in the campaign planting questions, and this incident carried the same media-manipulating smell.) Clinton's response — "No woman is illegal!" — caused many to forget her doubletalk at a debate last October about drivers licenses for undocumented immigrants when she took both sides of the issue. Indeed, during the Nevada caucus, some of her supporters gushed to reporters that "Hillary supports amnesty" for immigrants.

That blatant level of pandering from the team that had, during eight years in power, done so much damage to Mexican-Americans and their country of ancestry, has to be viewed now in the context of the race-baiting tactics that have dominated the Democratic primaries in early 2008. According to the entrance poll of Nevada caucus-goers, 64 percent of Hispanic voters favored Clinton to just 25 percent for Obama, while 83 percent of African-Americans backed Obama to only 16 percent for Clinton. If those percentages hold in the Feb. 5 California primary (and in other contests that same day in New York, New Jersey, Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado, also with large numbers of Hispanic voters), Clinton may soon be on the road to the Democratic nomination.

DISARMING A TIME BOMB

The day after his narrow defeat in Nevada, Obama went to the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, and seemed to acknowledge that he has work to do to reverse, or at least dampen, the trend of Latino voters for Clinton.

From the pulpit where Martin Luther King Jr. once preached, he said to the predominantly Black congregation:

"If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that none of our hands are entirely clean. If we're honest with ourselves, we'll acknowledge that our own community has not always been true to King's vision of a beloved community.

"We have scorned our gay brothers and sisters instead of embracing them. The scourge of anti-Semitism has, at times, revealed itself in our community. For too long, some of us have seen immigrants as competitors for jobs instead of companions in the fight for opportunity."

The Obama camp certainly recognizes the problem, but so far hasn't taken that message to the ground level, to the homes and neighborhoods and restaurants, and, yes, in front of television cameras, to break bread together with Hispanic-Americans to make his case more forcefully.

Obama — not Clinton — was a co-sponsor of the Immigrant Reform Bill that was the central issue of 2007 for the Latino population. He has to make that case and do so fast or the Black-Latino rift that the Clintons have so cynically encouraged could become the story of the remaining Democratic primaries, leading to such acrimony that one group, or the other, stays home in November.

Even with an endorsement by Sen. Ted Kennedy, the most visible sponsor of the Immigration Reform Bill and highly respected by many Latino voters, Obama is going to have to confront the Black-Latino rift seen in Nevada head-on if he has hope of gaining the nomination.

The terrible Clinton legacy of U.S. government mistreatment of Mexican-Americans — including the majority that are legal citizens — provides the constitutional law professor and civil rights lawyer from Illinois the opening to do so. But the time bomb of Black-Latino division is ticking and could explode, as soon as Tsunami Tuesday rolls in Feb. 5.

This article originally appeared at counterpunch.org. For more of Al Giordano's 2008 election coverage, see ruralvotes.com/thefield.

ELECTION

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PHOTO: CCR.JUSTICE.ORG

INTERVIEW BY JESSICA LEE

In February 2002, the Center for Constitutional Rights was the first, and for years the only, law organization to challenge the detention of those being held without legal redress at the U.S. military prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. At the time, no one was willing to stand up for the rights of purported “terrorists.” In 2004, however, the Center’s habeas corpus petitions on behalf of Guantánamo detainees, reached the U.S. Supreme Court. In a shocking victory, the court ruled that detainees had the right under existing federal statutes to challenge their detention in court. To thwart the ruling, Congress passed the Detainee Treatment Act in 2005 and the Military Commissions Act of 2006, stripping detainees of their rights.

In a few months, the Supreme Court will decide in the cases of *Al Odah v. United States* and *Boumediene v. Bush*, if detainees have a constitutional right to habeas corpus, the fundamental right of those being held to challenge their detention before a court of law. The decision promises to have sweeping implications for civil liberties and the reach of executive power.

Taking a break from preparing opening arguments for the recent Supreme Court case, Center of Constitutional Rights President Michael Ratner spoke to *The Independent* about living on the political edge of civil rights litigation.

Q. The cases of Al Odah v. United States and Boumediene v. Bush were brought by the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) and are the first to directly challenge the constitutionality of the Military Commissions Act of 2006. Why are they so important?

When we took the case, [Guantánamo prisoners] were considered the “worst of the worst” by Donald Rumsfeld. These people were advertised as people who wanted to bomb the United States and who were involved in 9/11. We discussed this case carefully at the Center and decided that these cases were about the fundamental right for people to go into a court and ask the government why they are being detained.

We have always considered executive detention to be the dividing line between being in a police state. Without habeas corpus, people can be disappeared. People at Guantánamo are held without habeas remedy. [The question is], does the Constitution protect the right of non-civilians at Guantánamo to habeas corpus?

Q. It has been more than six years since 9/11. From the viewpoint of a human rights attorney, how did this event change the priorities of CCR? What are some of the legal challenges you worked on post-9/11?

We had to take up an entire gamut of cases post-9/11. We have 10 people doing Guantánamo-related work, who have high-level security clearances. One of the people they are working with is one of the 14 “ghost detainees.”

We have taken on the so-called “war on terror.” We started litigating cases regarding the round-ups [which began the day after September 11, 2001], saying that you cannot detain “non-citizens.” You cannot keep them in prison if they did nothing wrong.

The second area of litigation was around the first case of extraordinary rendition involving a Canadian citizen [Maher Arar], who was sent through JFK airport to Syria to be tortured. He has been found not guilty and received substantial cash compensation [from the Canadian government]. We have been involved in cases regarding the round-ups, warrantless wiretapping and torture.

We are firmly against the war in Iraq,

and [opposed] the war against Iraq three months before it started. It is a made-up war, an illegal war. We are anxious to [litigate] the Blackwater case because it will deal with the war. The war is hard to get at legally.

Q. Tell us about the Blackwater case?

This case is another example of how the Center is really looking at a situation and then taking really aggressive legal action. Our involvement in this goes back longer than Blackwater, when we took up cases against [U.S. private military contractors] Titan Corp. and CACI International Inc. for abuses in Abu Ghraib.

We took up cases against the torture situation against detainees at Abu Ghraib and in Afghanistan. But it is very hard to litigate these cases in the United States due to immunity issues. The administration is not going to do anything and Congress appears dead on these issues. We did the [war crimes] cases against Rumsfeld about Guantánamo; but we lost. We decided in addition to going directly against Rumsfeld, to go against the private contractors involved because they would not get the same immunity.

We received the court decision against CACI. It was sort of a precedent against private contractors. With another lawyer, Susan Burke, we set up a place where we could get hold of people who were tortured at Abu Ghraib. And as a result, when the Blackwater issue happened, we were already on the ground in Baghdad to take action.

This case is fundamental to what is going on in the country, and the world, where things are being privatized, from toll roads in Indiana to issues discussed in Naomi Klein’s book, *The Shock Doctrine*. This is a way to get at what I consider a negative change towards privatization. This case is extremely exciting to me. Private armies running around the world is medieval, the same as torture, waterboarding and Guantánamo.

Q. CCR is often described as ‘ahead of the curve’ in both identifying a problem and in suggesting novel or radical legal responses which, over time, become accepted and respected precedents and theories. Talk about this.

The Guantánamo and post-September 11 cases are the best recent examples. CCR took on representing the first person in Guantánamo in 2002, not another human rights organization was willing to take it on. For this, we received a large amount of hate mail.

We would talk about it in the office, about the risks we were willing to take by going along with representing the “worst of the worst.” These set of risks included our credibility in the community, to our funding, and personal risks. We couldn’t get some of the most progressive lawyers to work with us in Washington.

We went with the case in the face of both charges it would set a bad precedence and that it was unpopular. We are not concerned with the argument that the case would set a precedent or make bad laws, but rather interested in representing clients and changing the social landscape.



Center for Constitutional Rights President Michael Ratner

Michael Ratner is a CCR attorney and author and the 2007 recipient of the Puffin/Nation Prize for Creative Citizenship for his lifelong work defending civil liberties. To read the extended interview, see independent.org. Visit ccrjustice.org for more information.

Disorder in the Court

BY ELLEN DAVIDSON

On Jan. 11, the sixth anniversary of the opening of the U.S. military prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, some 50 activists milled around inside the Supreme Court building. Witness Against Torture, which organized the action, had chosen this site because the court will rule soon in the cases of *Al Odah v. United States* and *Boumediene v. Bush* on the constitutionality of holding nearly 300 Guantánamo prisoners without giving them the right to challenge their detention in a court of law.

On this cold rainy day, there were few regular tourists present, and we tried ineffectually to be inconspicuous, intently studying the busts of the chief justices that lined the walls. At a signal around 1:15 p.m., several people moved toward the front door, attempting to get outside and unfurl a banner at the top of the steps. Meanwhile, some 250 hooded marchers wearing orange jumpsuits arrived outside after a procession across the National Mall, and dozens of them stood on the steps with their own banner. Inside, I began singing a call and response: “Ain’t we got a right to the tree of life?” The marble floors and walls of the Great Hall reverberated with our voices.

The Supreme Court Police jumped the banner-holders, repeatedly throwing one older woman down on the floor. Another woman started reading a statement, only to have it snatched from her hands. We knelt in two lines along the hall, shouting “Shut it down!” Forty-three individuals were eventually arrested inside, while 37 others were detained outside. Most of us had handed our IDs off to support people, and when asked our names, we each gave the name of a man being held at Guantánamo.

Unused to protests inside the building, the Supreme Court Police took hours to process the 80 protesters, and most of us ended up being reprocessed later at different facilities. The next morning, after some of us had been moved through as many as five different cells during the night, we arrived at holding cells behind the courtroom. I was with 13 other women in a cell about two-thirds the size of my kitchen with a small bench along one wall. Some lucky ones had gotten a sandwich during the 20 hours of custody. Three women in my cell were vomiting from dehydration. (The judge, on hearing of these conditions from our lawyers, ordered the marshals to give us water.) Throughout the long day, we sang, trading songs with the men down the hall. The marshals told us we wouldn’t get out that day if we didn’t shut up.

After we spent 10 hours in shackles, they began taking us up in small groups to appear before a judge on federal charges of protesting at the Supreme Court and, for those inside, an additional charge of “causing a harangue.”

“My name is Ellen Davidson,” I told the judge, “but I was acting on behalf of Arkin Mahmud, a prisoner at Guantánamo who was born in China.” This was the moment we had spent 30 hours in jail for. Finally, at least a few of the imprisoned men’s names would appear on the record in a U.S. court.

Meanwhile, the same day as our protest, the D.C. Court of Appeals upheld the dismissal of a suit by four British men against former U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and other military officials. The men had been held and tortured at the Guantánamo prison. “Because the plaintiffs are aliens and were located outside sovereign U.S. territory at the time their alleged claim arose,” said the ruling, “they do not fall with the definition of ‘person.’”

For more information, see witness torture.org.



PHOTO: JOHN PAUL HORNBIK

international

FORMER INDONESIAN DICTATOR CROAKS

Former Indonesian dictator Suharto died Jan. 27 due to multiple organ failure. He was 86. Suharto, who ruled Indonesia from 1966 to 1998, presided over the killings of 1 million people during his reign, according to U.S. historians Barbara Harff and Ted Robert Gurr. As many as 500,000 suspected communists were killed during the year following Suharto’s rise to power in a U.S.-backed military coup. On the eve of the 1975 invasion of East Timor that left up to 200,000 people dead, President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger gave him the go-ahead to wage war. The East Timor Action Network called Suharto “one of the worst mass murderers of the 20th century.” In a 2004 report, Transparency International alleged Suharto and his family amassed a fortune of between \$15 and 35 billion during his presidency.



LATIN AMERICAN LEADERS LAUNCH FAIR TRADE BANK

Leaders of six Latin American nations agreed to form a bank to promote fair trade policies at a Jan. 25-26 conference in Caracas, Venezuela. The Bank of ALBA — which stands for the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas and means “Dawn” in Spanish — will begin with initial financing of more than \$1 billion, primarily from Venezuela. It will look to promote projects of economic integration and infrastructural development as well as progress in social, educational, cultural and health programs in the member nations.

“If your economy is controlled by speculative capital that only cares about profits, you can’t solve the huge problems affecting humanity,” said Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega. “Once we renounce the free trade model, we can begin to address the massive problems of unemployment, poverty and global warming.”

MEXICAN MINERS UNDER ATTACK

Mexican security forces attacked striking miners in the northern city of Cananea Jan. 11 after a labor board declared a five-month-old strike illegal. Twenty miners were injured and five others were reported missing. The workers went on strike at the end of July due to unsafe working conditions. Grupo Mexico, the mine’s owner, estimates it has lost \$600 million in revenue due to the walkout. In an interview with Bloomberg television, Napoleon Gomez Urrutia, President of the National Mining and Metal Workers Union, threatened more strikes to protest the repression at the Cananea copper pit, which is Mexico’s largest copper mine.

U.S. STILL SURGING IN IRAQ

Top U.S. commanders in northern Iraq are looking to intensify counter-insurgency efforts in Mosul, Iraq’s third-largest city. “It is not going to be this climactic battle ... It’s going to be probably a slow process,” Maj. Gen. Mark P. Hertling told *The Associated Press*. Hertling said he was moving a considerable force of “enablers” into the Nineveh province and Mosul, its capital. He would not disclose numbers, but said the move on Mosul had long been planned.

Freedom Surge: Palestinians Break Through Gaza Wall

By OSAMAH KHALIL

AL-ARISH, EGYPT—It is 4:30 a.m. and al-Arish’s souq is alive and packed with people. When asked where they are from, the inevitable reply with a broad grin is, “I am from Palestine!” This sleepy Egyptian resort town nestled in the middle of the northern Sinai coast has been virtually transformed over the past 48 hours by a massive influx of Palestinians from Gaza. Palestinians from across Gaza crowd the souq’s coffee houses and sandwich shops. An even greater number simply hang out, walking the city streets, talking, joking and smoking cigarettes, clearly enjoying the different scenery and “smelling new air.”

Since the towering metal and concrete border wall that Israel began to erect in 2003 was demolished by Hamas early on the morning of Jan. 23, hundreds of thousands of Gazans have crossed the border with Egypt daily. Traveling by foot, car, truck and donkey cart it is an unbelievable — almost indescribable — movement of people. The highway is jammed with packed taxis and pick-up trucks whose beds are filled beyond capacity and racing from Egyptian Rafah to al-Arish. Some journalists have called it a huge “jail break,” and while the prison analogy is apt, it does not accurately describe the horrors and humiliation suffered by Gazans during 40 years of occupation and more than 18 months of sanctions and siege. Perhaps the best description of how Gazans feel is a

deep exhale of relief and some joy — both rare commodities here.

Gaza’s economy has been devastated by a combination of sanctions since Hamas was elected in January 2006 and the siege that was imposed by Israel after the Hamas militia defeated Fatah forces in June 2007. In the first 24 hours after the wall fell, Palestinians rushed to buy essential supplies, everything from gas to flour. Items barred from entering Gaza during the siege were also among the first items purchased, including concrete, the lack of which has brought construction in the territory to a halt.

Although the wall has come down, the siege continues. Rafah, which receives some power supplies from Egypt, still has daily blackouts of eight hours a day. Northern and middle Gaza, including Gaza City, which rely on Israel for the vast majority of their power needs, have less than eight hours of electricity a day. Israel’s resumption of fuel supplies ensures that only the most basic needs will be met, in particular that of the health sector, to avoid adverse media attention.

Walking the length of the now partially demolished Rafah wall, one is struck by two contrasting and competing realities. On the one side lies the sliced and twisted remnant of Israel’s siege policy backed and underwritten by Washington, a clear demonstration that a people can only be suppressed and oppressed for so long. On the other side is the human cost, the more than 3,000 houses demolished by Israel in order to build

the wall. The remnants of those houses remain, creating a vast moonscape of blasted concrete and sand, roughly a kilometer wide and several kilometers long. Fida Qishta, a teacher and blogger from Rafah, points out where her house once stood, as well as those of other relatives. Beyond the sea of demolished houses are those still inhabited but riddled with bullet and shell holes from the past eight years. Her young cousin Walaa explains, “this is our life,” and it sums up both realities.

Whether the destruction of the Rafah wall will change the reality of life in Gaza remains to be seen. The days since Jan. 23 have also demonstrated that there is more to the destruction of the Rafah wall than the simple Hamas-Fatah dichotomy or the inane commentary about its impact on the “peace process.” Hamas could destroy the wall, but unless Palestinians were willing to cross the border and face the threat of Egyptian security forces it would have been a futile gesture. That Palestinians went over that line again and again illustrates the powerful urge for freedom from oppression and occupation. More importantly, it demonstrates what Palestinians can do when they act as a collective body.

The destruction of the Rafah wall was quite simply a victory of, and for, the Palestinian people. One can only hope that this time will be the first wall of many to fall in Palestine.

Left: A mother and daughter smile after buying a mattress in Egypt. Right: This boy bought a sheep for one U.S. dollar.

EXODUS: Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians streamed into Egypt Jan. 23 after militants blew holes in a wall that separates the Gaza Strip from Egypt. While people were able to stock up on basic goods before Egypt closed the border, Gaza’s 1.3 million residents still find themselves at risk of a humanitarian crisis due to a lack of fuel to power Gaza’s hospitals, sewage plants and other basic infrastructure. Israel and the United States have led the effort to isolate Gaza since Hamas, Palestine’s democratically elected government, took full control of the Strip last June.

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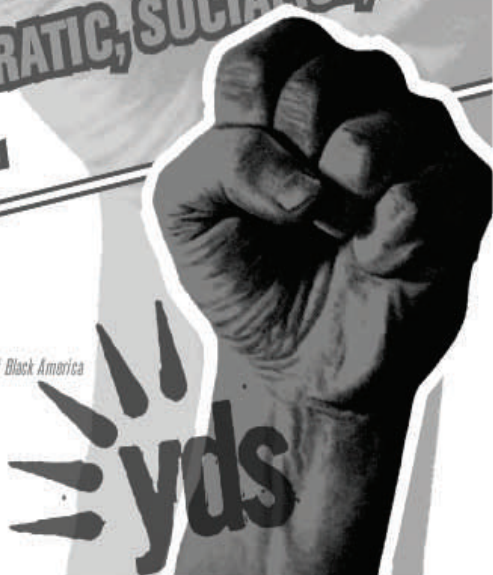
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Laura Carlsen is director of the **Americas Program** of the **Center for International Policy**. She has worked as a foreign policy analyst and journalist in Mexico for two decades and is co-editor of *Confronting Globalization: Economic Integration and Popular Resistance in Mexico*. For more information visit www.americaspolicy.org

Hector Sánchez is the Policy Education Coordinator for **Global Exchange's Mexico Program**. He represents the program in Washington, DC., where he coordinates efforts to inform and organize legislators and key organizations in support of new priorities on trade and immigration. See www.globalexchange.org/countries/americas/mexico/

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Bach Is Back

The Silence Before Bach
DIRECTED BY PERE PORTABELLA
FILMS 59, 2007

Even this early, it seems hardly premature to suggest that 2008 may not bring us a more purely beautiful film than Pere Portabella's *The Silence Before Bach*. Now 78, Portabella, who was the subject of a MoMA retrospective last fall, has exerted a major force of artistic creativity, cultural renewal and political commitment on the past half-century of Spanish cinema. Movies backed by his production company, Films 59, including Carlos Saura's *Los Golfos* (*The Delinquents*, 1959) and Luis Buñuel's *Viridiana* (1961), went against the tide of the fascist Franco regime in subversive and iconoclastic style.

Notwithstanding his prominent involvement in national politics (as a senator elected in Spain's first democratic elections and a co-writer of the current Spanish constitution), Portabella's own films reveal their political impetus "in attacking lin-



guistic codes," as he himself has stated. The aesthetic and political dimensions of his films are indistinguishable, attesting to a cinematic sensibility he shares with countrymen Victor Erice and Jose-Luis Guerín, whose *En El Ciudad De Sylvia* (*In The City Of Sylvia*, 2007) proved one of the highlights of last year's New York Film Festival.

The Silence Before Bach establishes the unifying power of Bach's music across scarcely connecting narrative strands that bridge countries and centuries to tap into the lives of a plethora of people, including Bach himself, two musical truck drivers, a bookseller, a Leipzig tourist guide, a cellist and the cantor of the St. Thomas Church. By tracing a (Germanic-Hispanic) bond of European history through this music, Portabella does for Bach what Todd Haynes fails to do for Bob Dylan in the misconceived *I'm Not There*, which shows little interest in either music or American history.

Portabella's work cannot be categorized as documentary or fiction, history or myth, but is predicated on the tensions between image and sound, space and time. *The Silence Before Bach* explores music as language through the cinema, and does so with uncompromising radicalism.

In an age when vacuous rhetoric



Revolutions: Read All About 'Em

MAO: *On Practice and Contradiction*
(INTRODUCTION BY SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK)

ROBESPIERRE: *Virtue and Terror*
(INTRODUCTION BY SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK)

THOMAS JEFFERSON: *The Declaration of Independence*
(INTRODUCTION BY MICHAEL HARDT)

HO CHI MINH: *Down With Colonialism!*
(INTRODUCTION BY WALDEN BELLO)

THE LEVELLERS: *The Putney Debates*
(INTRODUCTION BY GEOFFREY ROBERTSON)

TROTSKY: *Terrorism and Communism*
(INTRODUCTION BY SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK)

JESUS CHRIST: *The Gospels*
(INTRODUCTION BY TERRY EAGLETON)

ALL PUBLISHED BY VERSO, 2007

Few people talk much about revolutions any more, and many of those who do work in advertising. "The digital download revolution" is one of the more common invocations of the word "revolution" in 2008. The political left, in particular, seems to have left it far behind. And yet on a basic level, argue the authors included thus far in the excellent new Verso

series *Revolutions*, revolutions are more than marketing — no matter what the cynical salespeople of the post-ideological *Adbusters* era might have to say. The eight books in the series, wonderfully packaged in a set of brightly-hued and ideologically themed colors, run the gamut from the *Gospels of Jesus Christ* to *The Putney Debates* to *Down With Colonialism!* And the almost uniformly excellent introductions written by modern-day revolutionary theorists like Michael Hardt, Walden Bello, Terry Eagleton and Slavoj Žižek should justify plunking down hard-earned cash on writings mostly available for free online.

With a series so wide-ranging in scope and temperament, where to dip in first? One option is to go with the oddest selection to date — and I don't mean with *The Gospels*, whose pages have been inspiring revolutionaries of various stripes for thousands of years. No, surely the inclusion of the Declaration of Independence and selected letters of the (aristocratic, slave-raping) Thomas Jefferson has to be the first sign that this series isn't content to stay within the lines. In the best case, Michael Hardt's introductory reinterpretations of Jefferson salvage the revolutionary kernel of much radical American thought; in the worst case, Hardt's vague discussion of Jeffersonian popular education and "democracy as a means and ends" dresses up a vapid species of liberalism as militancy. Although I gener-

ously sympathize with the former view, an equally useful function of Hardt's introduction is that it serves as a foil for Slavoj Žižek's far more extreme (and far more disturbing to American ears) meditations on revolutionary transition and proletarian "dictatorship."

Žižek, having written three introductions thus far, has the advantage of profligacy in order to make a point. For those familiar with his recent argument in favor of a "return to Lenin," the point won't be entirely new, but Žižek, as one of the most important radical intellectuals living today, has earned the right to carry his argument to a larger audience. In a sense, Žižek sets himself the task of defending the indefensible (with qualifications) — the Terror of the French Revolution, Trotsky's "war communism," and Mao's "cultural revolution." He does this by attacking the very core of Hardt and Jefferson's arguments, debunking democracy in favor of the dictatorship of the proletariat (and, it is implied, of the revolutionary party). Democracy, for Žižek (as it was for Trotsky, Lenin and others) is a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie that masks itself in the idealist illusion of freedom. To the degree this is true, Žižek argues, a dictatorship of the truly oppressed is a far more preferable alternative.

Of course, in any series as sweeping as this one, a multitude of other issues arise. One can criticize Terry Eagleton's introduction to *The Gos-*

pels, for neglecting any discussion of "liberation theology," which emphasizes the Christian mission to bring justice to the poor and oppressed. Perhaps more fundamentally, later volumes in the series seem to move away from the focus on revolutionary theory to a more situational discussion of revolutionary practice. While there is nothing wrong with this shift in focus per se, it is doubtful that any general reader would be prepared to wade through more than 200 pages of Ho Chi Minh's detailed strategic discussions of the Vietnamese planned economy, despite Walden Bello's praise of Ho's "non-theoretical revolutionary pragmatism."

What other volumes could be included in future installations of *Revolutions*? Certainly, one or two 19th century anarchist thinkers will make the cut (complete with black covers). Revolutionary feminist writings, and introductions written by women, are absent to an almost offensive degree (pink covers?). Two additional groups of writings could also be added — entries that, like the juxtaposition of Mao and Jefferson, would help continue the usefully schizophrenic tenor of the series. The Islamic revolutionary movements may be a far cry from the series' current focus but, combined with Foucault's reflections of the 1979 Iranian revolution and his writings on biopower, their inclusion in the series would mark a productive engagement of our current historical zeitgeist. On the other side of the spectrum, a collection of writings on revolutionary non-violence (Tolstoy, Gandhi, King) would be most welcome. Biopolitical Islamism and the Civil Rights movement — the inclusion of these bookends of our (post)modern revolutionary consciousness would carry Verso's excellent series well into the 21st century.

—CHRIS ANDERSON

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flourishes, Portabella reconnects with the musicality and physicality of language through the rhythms of Bach. We see a dog, cat, horse, man and pianola move to music that envelops an invariably live soundtrack, but is never performed for an audience. Between the opening image of an empty gallery space and the white screen finale, a stage is set and a journey embarked on, not of genius or showmanship, but bodily motion, the mechanics of instruments, the concentration of rehearsals and practice sessions.

The process of work and the progress of travel flesh out the life force of Bach's music, expressed most poi-

gnantly and literally in the blood Mendelssohn wipes off the sheets of paper in which his butcher has wrapped an order of meat, to discover that they contain the St. Matthew Passion. A similarly visceral (re)discovery of Bach is what Portabella offers us. If the artistic achievement of a film means that it should be eye- and ear-opening, and on a good day even make us open our hearts, *The Silence Before Bach* triumphs on all counts.

—KENNETH CRAB

The Silence Before Bach is currently playing at the Film Forum.

Reclaiming Creation

The Business of Being Born
DIRECTED BY ABBY EPSTEIN
RED ENVELOPE ENTERTAINMENT AND INTERNATIONAL FILM CIRCUIT, 2007

Alone woman, sucking in air through a clear plastic mask, hair hidden under a blue cap, lies fear-stricken on a hospital bed. The white walls

close in on her, the IV drips labor-inducing drugs into her blood as strangers with medical degrees look down upon her. This is how 99 percent of the next generation enters the world in the United States.

An unapologetic low-budget documentary, *The Business of Being Born* follows two mothers, TV icon Ricki Lake and New York filmmaker Abby Epstein, as they question why midwifery and homebirths have been pushed off the table as birthing options. A collage of women, doctors and midwives put the American medi-

cal establishment on trial, calling into question the alarming statistics of hospital births: the United States has the second worst newborn death rate, and the highest birth-associated costs, in the industrialized world — and explore alternatives to this medical disempowerment of women.

In one close-up shot, a nude woman delivers her baby in a rush of bloody fluids, squatting in her New York kitchen. In another, a midwife hugs a near-mother from behind, hands locked together around her bare breasts, helping her with the natural motions of labor. In a raw bathtub scene, the naked Ricki Lake documents herself taking hold of her baby the second it slops from the birth canal into the water.

The film succinctly covers the pros of a natural birth, but only momentarily touches on the 1,500-year legacy of how discrimination against women healers has created the nightmare of modern childbirth. In their 1972 book *Witches, Midwives and Nurses*, authors Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English explore how the partnership of the Church, State and the upper-class, male medical profession secured a monopoly on healing and childbirth throughout Europe. Through centuries of organized witchhunts, they write, millions of women healers were burnt alive. As medical knowledge spread from the Arab world, women and the poor were shut out as education and licensing, permitted only to men, were instituted as requirements to practice medicine.

A homebirth, the film tells us, is about “getting the hell out of the hospital” and reclaiming the power of creation and the rights to our body. But this radical act must be coupled with a wider social justice health movement.

The *Business of Being Born* is currently playing at the Independent Film Center.

Rockin’ History

Honeydripper
DIRECTED BY JOHN SAYLES
ANARCHIST’S CONVENTION FILMS,
HONEYDRIPPER FILMS, 2007

Two-thirds of the way through *Honeydripper*, the piano player Tyrone “Pine Top” Purvis (Danny Glover), imagines the first Black man who ever played a piano. It was a house slave, he says, who could play African instruments, and who could “play mud if you give him the key and the tempo, he’s got music in his head, in his heart, in every damn piece of him there’s music. ... And one day ... he’s alone in the room with that piano and he comes over and sits down on the bench ... and he spreads his fingers out ... and he ... thinks, ‘Lord help me, I could do some damage with this.’”

And his best friend and partner says, “Would have liked to been there. I mean to hear the cat play, not none of the rest of it.”

The moment is the heart of *Honeydripper*, an epic in miniature, the story of Black American music told through one weekend in the life of the Honeydripper Café — and Pine Top, its pianist and proprietor — in the rural Alabama town of Harmony in 1950. The café is

failing; no one wants to hear Pine Top’s barrelhouse piano anymore. Locals are going to a neighboring bar with a juke box full of rhythm and blues. Pine Top decides to import a blues guitar star from New Orleans, for one night only. Then a guitar-playing stranger drifts into town, with a new kind of music, and we are present at what may be the birth of rock and roll, at exactly the kind of Black bar that educated rock pioneers Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis.

Honeydripper is a lyrical departure for the usually austere John Sayles, who wrote, directed and edited the film. As always, he paints a large canvas, but this time, he’s tugging at heartstrings as well as minds. He has the help of stellar turns by Lisa Gay Hamilton as Pine Top’s spiritually troubled wife Delilah, Stacy Keach as Harmony’s malevolent white sheriff, Keb’ Mo’ as a blind street musician who serves as a chorus for the film, and, in a single-scene appearance, Mary Steenburgen as the wistful wife of Harmony’s wealthiest citizen. But it’s Glover, in the performance of his career, who holds the film together.

All that said, this review is by a white woman of a film by a white man about Black life. From where I sat, it appeared to be Sayles’ masterpiece, a soaring portrait of human resilience in general and Black resilience in particular. Whether or not it’s a true picture is for others to say, not me — or Sayles.

—JUDITH MAHONEY PASTERNAK



reader comments

Continued from Page 2

Responses to “A Hunger for Home: Stranded in the Desert, Darfur’s Refugees Live with an Endless War,” Jan 12:

What about the fact that the entire U.S. foreign policy establishment is straining to sell us the same story, one that justifies U.S. “humanitarian” intervention in Darfur? Bush supports intervention. Obama and Clinton do too. Isn’t that a bad sign? There are rumors that Blackwater and similar mercenary outfits may already be on the ground. Our country’s media and leaders only brand mass killings as “genocide” when they make no profits. Congo borders on the Sudan, and five million people have been killed there since about 1996. But

we never hear about genocide in Congo, perhaps because Western companies are profiting from what happens there. In Sudan, the Chinese are getting the oil. So killings in Sudan are genocide. What’s up with that?

—BRUCE DIXON

Good piece. I wonder what Nicholas Powers thinks about the racial element in Darfur. This war is often framed in racial terms: that it’s the Arab North versus the Black African South. However, I have also read that race in Sudan is not so, for lack of a better term, black and white. Often it is difficult to tell the difference between the two sides by just looking at someone’s exterior.

I find in Powers’ article that he emphasizes the natural resource

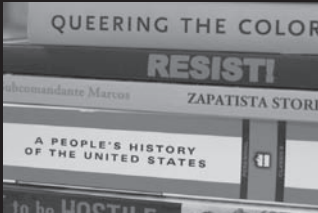
and geo-economic factors more than the racial factors that have led to this conflict. The Arab/Muslim versus Black African Animist/Christian angle plays in the U.S. and the West’s Iraq conflict and the need to demonize Arab Muslims. I also see that the African American churches latched onto the slavery aspect of the conflict, that the Arab/Muslims took Black Africans as slaves. That is not touched upon in this piece, however; is it a problem? Many mainstream Jewish American groups are heavily involved in bringing the situation to a close. Once again the Muslim-Arab as bad guy fits nicely into the Israeli versus Palestinian conflict.

—ANONYMOUS

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